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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 131021878-4158-02]

RIN 0648-XD588

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amounts of Pacific cod from catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 meters) length overall (LOA) using pot gear, catcher vessels using trawl gear, and American Fisheries Act (AFA) catcher/processors (C/Ps) to Amendment 80 (A80) C/Ps, C/Ps using hook-and-line gear, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. This action is necessary to allow the 2014 total allowable catch of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective October 27, 2014, through 2400 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2014.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 907-586-7269.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI) according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management

Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2014 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) specified for catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear in the BSAI is 15,976 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) and sector reallocations (79 FR 49463, August 21, 2014 and 79 FR 57838, September 26, 2014). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear will not be able to harvest 1,500 mt of the remaining 2014 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(5).

The 2014 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI is 45,607 mt as established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) and sector reallocations (79 FR 49463, August 21, 2014 and 79 FR 57838, September 26, 2014). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels using trawl gear will not be able to harvest 2,500 mt of the remaining 2014 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(9).

The 2014 Pacific cod TAC specified for AFA C/Ps in the BSAI is 5,965 mt as established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) and sector reallocation (79 FR 57838, September 26, 2014). The Regional Administrator has determined that AFA C/Ps will not be able to

harvest 500 mt of the remaining 2014 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(7).

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(A) and § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(B), NMFS reallocates 4,500 mt of Pacific cod to A80 C/Ps, C/Ps using hook-and line-gear, and C/Ps using pot gear in the BSAI.

The harvest specifications for Pacific cod included in the final 2014 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014, 79 FR 49463, August 21, 2014, and 79 FR 57838, September 26, 2014) are revised as follows: 14,476 mt for catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear, 43,107 mt for catcher vessels using trawl gear, 5,465 mt for AFA C/Ps, 33,631 mt to A80 C/Ps, 111,516 mt for C/Ps using hook-and-line gear, and 5,889 mt for C/Ps using pot gear.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the reallocation of Pacific cod specified from other sectors to A80 C/Ps, C/Ps using hook-and-line gear, and C/Ps using pot gear in the BSAI. Since these fisheries are currently open, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the revised allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow

the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of October 22, 2014.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: October 27, 2014.

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.